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ABSTRACT

This report presents ideas on the use of poetry in teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language. Chapter 1 describes beliefs about language and language learning, and offers a theoretical justification for including the reading and writing of poetry in the language classroom. Chapter 2 is a collection of poetry activities that have been developed or gleaned from other works on language teaching. Chapter 3 consists of an anthology of poetry arranged under broad topic headings. An appendix contains a classification of the poems according to features of pronunciation, grammar, spelling, semantics. This classification is by no means complete, but it is hoped that it will assist teachers in integrating poetry into their lesson plans, and spark their imaginations as to additional ways to use poetry. The final section provides suggestions for further reading. Two bibliographies provide 57 citations.

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TURNING THE KALEIDOSCOPE: POETRY IN THE E.S.L. CLASSROOM

Toni Maschler
B. A. University of Massachusetts 1987

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont U.S.A.

September 1990

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents my ideas on the use of poetry in teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language. Chapter one describes some of my beliefs about language and language learning, and offers a theoretical justification for including the reading and writing of poetry in the language classroom. Chapter two is a collection of poetry activities which I have either developed myself or gleaned from other works on language teaching. Chapter three consists of an anthology of poetry arranged under broad topic headings. This is followed by an appendix in which I classify the poems according to features of pronunciation, grammar, spelling, and semantics. This classification is by no means complete, but it is hoped that it will assist teachers in integrating poetry into their lesson plans, and spark their imaginations as to additional ways to use poetry. The final section proffers some suggestions for further reading.

ERIC Descriptors: Second language instruction, Poetry, English Instruction, Educational methods, Learning strategies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: A RATIONALE 1

II. ACTIVITIES WITH POETRY 16
1. Found Poems 17
2. Kennings 18
3. Scrambled Poems 19
4. Building Up from Memory 20
5. Illustration 21
6. List Poems 21
7. Wishes 22
8. Group History 23
9. I Used to...But Now... 24
10. Drip, Drop, Drizzle 24
11. I Don't Like 25
12. The Thinginess of Things 26
13. Unrolling a Poem 27
14. Nonsense Sense 28
15. Limerick Completion 29
16. Reading Aloud and Acting Out 31
17. Taking Off from the Poem 32

III. ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY 35
Prelude: Poetry 36
Stuff and Nonsense 38
Brief foolishness and word-play 38
Epic nonsense verse 42
Riddles and Surprise Endings 50
A Second Opinion: Contrasting Viewpoints . . 53
Lovers, Friends, and Enemies 57
To Look at Any Thing 62

Things Are Not What They Seem 66
Reflections 69
Poems for Multiple Voices 75
Special Forms 80
Haiku 80
Diamantes and cinquains 81
Limericks 82
Folk Poetry 85
Proverbs 85
Folk songs 86
Children's Chants and Games 89
Children's Taunts and Threats 89
Autograph Verses 90
Miscellaneous Quotes 91

POSTSCRIPT 93

APPENDICES
I. Poems listed alphabetically by title 94
II. Poems listed according to features of pronunciation, grammar, spelling and semantics . 98

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 102

BIBLIOGRAPHIES
I. General bibliography 104
II. Bibliography of poetry sources 107

I. LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: A RATIONALE

What is language, and what, therefore, is language learning? What is the body of knowledge that must be acquired and how is this done?

Language is composed of sounds and words and sentences which serve as vehicles of communication and expression. Language teaching has generally emphasized the communicative aspect of language over the expressive, and has focussed upon the twin elements of vocabulary and syntax. The common wisdom has been this: language is composed of words, so students must learn vocabulary; these words are ordered, so students must learn syntax. These two elements seem necessary to language learning, but are they sufficient? Does a grasp of vocabulary and syntax equal language proficiency?

This description fails to capture the rich internal/external, expressive/communicative system we call language. It fails to differentiate between so-called "artificial languages" such as those used by computers, and real languages, languages capable of irony, flirtation, allusion, imprecation, humor, poetry... Language is alive; amputate all but vocabulary and syntax and it no longer flirts or curses; it has lost its soul. How many English teachers have taught English sans soul? How many E.S.L.

students actually believe that English has none?

> For my students, getting started meant developing a new relationship with English words....It seemed that they needed to discover that a word in the new language was more than just a sound or a pattern of marks on the page, more than a mere fill-in-the-blank unit. They needed to discover that a single word in this language, just like words in their own tongue, could conjure up a whole world--a network of associations extending endlessly outward through their being. (Cocking, 1989, p.70).

A real language involves connotation as well as denotation, originality as well as orthodoxy. A real language is simultaneously a mirror of the speaker and a lens through which he or she sees; an utterance is both conventional and creative, both message and means. Poet John Ciardi describes poetry as consisting of four essential elements: image, form, rhythm, and diction. In a less disciplined way, these four elements constitute the means by which any linguistic message is expressed. These elements are components of language. How can they be learned?

In her preface to Language Learning Strategies (1990), Rebecca Oxford begins by outlining the skills required for becoming a more proficient language learner. These requirements are:

-A more practiced eye

-A more receptive ear

-A more fluent tongue

-A more involved heart

-A more responsive mind

I might add to this something like "a more playful soul," or a more active use and manipulation of the

language.

Oxford begins by analyzing learning rather than language. She observes the learner's active promotion of his or her own improvement in the language, and the teacher's role in fostering this improvement. This concentration on the learner frees Oxford from rigid and inadequate definitions of language. Learners with the "mores" will improve their language ability, not just their vocabulary or syntax. They will increase their proficiency in understanding and using language as both means and message.

The Apt Learner

"Language aptitude" is very mysterious. Whether it exists and, if so, exactly what it is, is debatable. But it is clear that successful language learning does not necessarily correlate with "high intelligence" as measured by I.Q. tests, and that successful language learners do not all use the same strategies to achieve their success. Talented language learners use a great variety of strategies and "intelligences" (cf. Gardner, 1988) to facilitate their learning. A language class should afford every student the opportunity to use his or her strengths and develop new strategies for learning.

In the current essay I advocate the use of poetry in the language classroom because of its multi-layeredness. Poetry's complexity allows students to utilize a wide

variety of strengths and strategies--to be or to become apt language learners. I see poetry as a tool for improving students' language skills in all areas, for keeping language whole and real, for helping learners attain "a more practiced eye, a more receptive ear, a more fluent tongue, a more involved heart, a more responsive mind, and a more playful soul."

A More Responsive Mind:

During the heyday of the Audio Lingual Method, language was viewed as simply a set of habits to be acquired. In reaction against this definition of language learning, teachers began to downplay the mechanical, rote aspects of learning language, and to emphasize the communicative, expressive, and creative aspects. But communication, self-expression and creation notwithstanding, language learning is still essentially dependent on memory. Learning a new language requires the retention and production of new sounds, sound combinations, words, patterns of words, meanings of words, associations of meanings, etc. The over-arching concern of the language learner is to remember.

Many learners and teachers will balk at this emphasis on memory, insisting that memorization is unpleasant, stultifying, and not particularly effective. I suspect that they are invoking a narrower definition of memory than the one I espouse. Rote memorization is the least effective kind of memorization. Learning by rote is a crude way to

learn. Language is too vast and too complex to be learned by rote. Language learning, and learning in general, requires meaningful memorization, the systematic integration of new information into the extant network of material in the mind.

> In mental terms, the more other facts a fact is associated with in the mind, the better possession of it our memory retains. Each of its associates becomes a hook by which it hangs, a means to fish it up by when sunk beneath the surface. Together, they form a network of attachments by which it is woven into the entire tissue of our thought. The "secret of good memory" is thus the secret of forming diverse and multiple associations with every fact we care to retain....Briefly then, of two men with the same outward experiences and the same amount of mere native tenacity, the one who thinks over his experiences most, and weaves them into systematic relationship with each other, will be the one with the best memory (William James in Brown, 1987 p.67).

I suggest that poetry is supremely well suited for language learning because of its memorableness, the number and variety of ways that a poem or components of a poem can be attached to other information in the mind. Poetry relates words rhythmically, phonemically (rhyme, alliteration), conceptually (metaphor, description, personification), visually, and emotionally.
Long-term retention is the mental linking of new and old information. The greater the number of links and the stronger and more vivid they are, the more securely learned the new information is. The burden of remembering the vocabulary, syntactic patterns, inflections, gender, and

orthography of a new language is great; the only way the mind can retain this enormous amount of information is by integrating it into a system, by chunking multiple bits into larger meaningful units.

The vast discrepancy between our ability remember isolated "bits" (what I will term rote memory) and to remember the same information systematically "recoded" into "chunks" (what I will term meaningful memory) is striking. George Miller, in "The magical number seven plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information," deals with precisely this issue. Meaningful memorization is the dynamic process of "weaving [inputs] into systematic relationships with each other" (Miller, 1956).

In the field of language teaching, Stevick (1976) also stresses the importance of meaningful memorization. He cites a study which demonstrates the difference in the amount of information retained by an "educated observer"--one who can integrate the information into a system--and an "uneducated observer"--one who does not have the knowledge required to systematize the information. In this study, conducted by Simon (1974), 20-25 chess pieces were positioned on a chess board and after studying the arrangement for five to ten seconds observers were asked to reproduce it. When the pieces had been positioned randomly, all of the subjects tested got about six pieces in the right

positions. However, when the arrangement was part of an actual game, the subjects' abilities diverged widely. Those who did not play chess still got about six right, but the chess players were able to duplicate the positioning almost perfectly. Because of their knowledge of chess, the arrangement was meaningful to them; they were able to systematize the information and hence remember it.

This is not a novel idea. Mnemonic devices serve as mnemonics precisely because they create systematic associations. The names and order of the planets is recalled by remembering the meaningful and humorous sentence "My very elegant mother just sat upon nine porcupines." The sequence of colors in a spectrum is "chunked" into the name "Roy G. Biv" (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet).

In examining memory, quite a few people have looked at cognitive/logical associations in chunking, but few have examined other chunking systems. I am convinced that logical connection is only one means of chunking information. D.W. Harding (1976) cites experiments conducted by R. MacDougal and J. B. Miner nearly a century ago studying rhythmic perception. MacDougal and Miner found that all sequences of sensory stimuli were perceived by listeners as composed of units with a specific internal rhythm. To use Miller's term, the listeners chunked the stimuli rhythmically. I myself frequently use rhythmic and

acoustic chunking to assist my memory; the only way I can remember my zip code, for instance, is by chanting to myself "Bráttlebòro, Vermónt, óh-five,thrée-oh-òne.

Several of the various means by which information may be chunked are presented in Stevick's (1986) investigation of the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon--a circumstance in which one can't quite remember something, or "mis"-remembers it. Stevick points out that a "mis"-remembered word generally shares certain features with the desired word. He regards each word as composed of a series of "items," each item being a pictorial, auditory, orthographic, visceral, or other feature of the word. In his example of attempting to recall the name "Simmons," he illustrates what he means by an "item": has two syllables; has more than one syllable; stressed syllable rhymes with "him"; an English name; first consonant is "s"; contains more than one nasal consonant; no two syllables have the same vowel; name of a mattress company (p.10).

Each of a word's items serves as a way to commit it to long-term memory, to encode it in Gagné's (1985) terminology. If remembering a word is contingent upon encoding a sufficient number of items, then should conscious attention be drawn to these various items? Can students improve their ability to notice different language features, encode them, and make use of them in recall?

Poetry uses pictorial, auditory, orthographic, and

visceral features of language in a more explicit way than does prose. Puns and metaphors demand the creation of images. Rhyme, alliteration, and rhythm underscore sound. Concrete poetry and acrostics showcase a word's spelling. A successful poem engenders an emotional response in the reader. Any one of these language-features constitutes an item which the learner can use so as to encode more effectively.

A More Receptive Ear; A More Practiced Eye

Learning relies on one's powers of observation. An ethologist studying the habits of birds will not get far if she cannot distinguish between individual birds and note patterns in their actions. A language student will not get far if he or she cannot distinguish between individual sounds and meanings, and note patterns in their occurrence. With a receptive ear and a practiced eye, the student can register these distinctions and patterns, and constantly revise his or her hypotheses about English on this basis.

Poetry is language used to the utmost, language conscious of both sound and meaning. When listening to poetry or writing poetry, pattern and contrast play a crucial role, and one observes with a special thoroughness.

In the tongue-twister "She sells sea shells by the sea shore," the very nature of the tongue-twister points up the phonemic distinction between the "s" and the "sh" sounds. The limerick "There was a young fellow named Hall/ Who fell

into the spring in the fall/ 'Twould have been a sad thing/ Had he died in the spring/ But he didn't, he died in the fall." exemplifies the multiple meanings of the words "spring" and "fall." A person reading or writing poetry is actively observing the possibilities of language. And this attentiveness is heightened by talking about poetry: "Did you notice any sounds or words that were used again and again? Why do you think the author did that? " "Do you think the dog in this poem is friendly or mean? What makes you think so?" Poetry is a natural subject for investigation of the means chosen to convey a certain message.

A More Involved Heart

Teryl Lundquist (1990) looks back on her experience as a graduate student attending a workshop with Caleb Gattegno, originator of "the Silent Way." The culminating activity of the workshop was what Gattegno called "Sunday morning silent way worship." He taped the twelve word charts on the walls and asked the students to create poetry using only the words contained on the first two charts, then the first four, then more.

> "What followed was an inner poetry that created its own language from the simple words on the charts, images that startled me as they formed themselves from my few choices. With each poem I felt more freedom, more excitement, more love of the process (p.28).

Poem

Do you see the many colors
that are in our light?
Some are short and some
are long, some are here and
some are there, some are
yours and some are mine
I left the darker ones for you
and took the yellows and reds
but we can put them together
and find another name
if you like
It isn't the taking apart
that gives us green

Lundquist's poem is not especially moving to me. But it was to her. The fact that she could create poetry from those few words she had at her disposal was a revelation. A restricted vocabulary did not hinder her from thinking of and expressing unusual thoughts such as "It isn't the taking apart that gives us green."

I write poetry myself, and may even write better poetry in Spanish--a language in which I am not fluent--than I do in English. My Spanish ears and eyes are not yet jaded; the newness helps me notice small things. I listen to my native language with new ears as well, finding metaphor and imagery in what was once just a name. Too-literal translation can create beautiful or humorous Spanish phrases--poetry. The word "screwdriver" creates an image of a person driving a small spiralling vehicle. My very limitations in vocabulary force me to milk the most from each word, to stretch each word's limits, to make each word do its utmost. In addition, I am less judgmental about my Spanish poetry, I do

not paralyze myself by requiring brilliance. I take delight in my words.

Writing poetry can also serve an expressive or introspective function, a complement to the many external communicative tasks we perform with language. It highlights the creative aspects of language, releasing the language learner from some of the conventions which usually constrain a writer or speaker.

A More Fluent Tongue

Speaking can be a humiliating activity. Countless language students have been subjected to pronunciation drills in which they are punished for their aberrant pronunciation by a demand for a solo performance of the offending sound, and another, and another, and yet another. Repetition of meaningless sounds or context-less words is an exercise which causes most adults anxiety and embarrassment. But practicing tongue-twisters and reciting poetry are activities which native speakers engage in, and native speakers, too, stumble over their words and try to perfect their reading.

Poetry can serve as a sort of multi-levelled drill technique, integrating pronunciation with other elements of language. A student reciting a poem may be simultaneously pronouncing the /u/ phoneme, practicing the formation of "contrary to fact 'if clauses,'" acquiring the word "unicorn," and learning that a dove symbolizes peace and

purity.

Choral reading and recitation are frequently used with children in whole language classrooms. Since the children have already mastered the spoken language, the main function is developing literacy. But for second language learners choral reading serves the additional function of providing students the opportunity to speak without the burden of all eyes upon them. In addition, the recitation of short texts can equip students with a file of memorized language chunks which they can draw on in their own speech.

A More Playful Soul

Poetry is language in which how something is said is as important as what is said. Poetry is playing with language, taking delight in its words, its images, its forms, and its rhythms, and using all of these elements at once. Compare:

> Now of my three-score years and ten
> twenty will not come again
> subtract from seventy springs a score
> it only leaves me fifty more.
> Since fifty springs are little room
> In which to look at things in bloom
> Over the woodlands I must go
> To see the cherry hung with snow
> -A. E. Housman

with:

"I am twenty and will probably live to be seventy years old. That leaves me fifty more years, which isn't very much, so I think I'll go look at the cherry tree."

The magic is lost. The delightfulness of the numbers

coinciding with the rhythm in harmony with the image of blossoms overlaying the wistfulness of "will not come again" playing counterpoint to the security of the rhyme has withered. A poem is a gestalt induced by all of these elements but not reducible to them. Whether by skill or serendipity, or, more probably, a combination of the two, something new has been created, and is recreated anew by the reader. Both writing and reading (or hearing) poetry require active engagement with the language, with its means and its message, with its function as discourse.

Discourse is contextualized language: in normal speech the context is provided by social circumstances; in literature the context must be inferred from the text itself. "Please Miss, a poem's a set of words with a riddle in the middle!" shouts out a child, asked to look through poetry books in order to figure out what a poem is (in Hayhoe and Parker, 1988, p.1). Language learners are too often presented only with sets of words which lack riddles, sets of words which do not require or even allow the reader to make a personal contribution to them. Poetry is parsimonious. Because it leaves so much unsaid, it respects the learners' cognitive maturity even while it may accommodate a limited vocabulary and basic grammar. Writing poetry allows students to create much with little. And to take joy in their creation.

> In a kaleidoscope, apparently unrelated fragments of colored glass come together in a rich and coherent mosaic. With a turn of her hand, the child rearranges the colors into a new network of relationships, creates a new whole--and laughs with delight! In metaphor new networks, new patterns of meaning, are created (Cocking, 1989, p. 76).

The Educated Observer

A language learner with a more practiced eye, a more perceptive ear, a more fluent tongue, a more involved heart, a more responsive mind, and a more playful soul is an apt language learner. He or she has become an "educated observer" of English. The educated observer is better equipped to observe meaningfully, to systematically integrate his or her observations, and to put them to use. It is my hope that the activities and poems in the following chapters will assist teachers in helping their students become "educated observers."

II. ACTIVITIES WITH POETRY

In this chapter I present a sampling of classroom activities using poetry: reading it, writing it, analyzing it, or some combination of the three. Some of these activities are of my own invention; others are culled from various published materials. When I have taken an activity from a published source and not changed it significantly, I refer to it as "from" that source. When an activity is essentially my own, but there are sources which contain activities comparable in some way, I indicate these sources with the letters "cf."

Activities

1) Found poems (From Tsujimoto 1988, p.30)

This is a good first poetry activity for students of any age or level. "Finding" poems encourages students to start thinking consciously about language's rhythm, image, sound... but in a very relaxed, non-intimidating way. It can also be used to explore the semantic role of punctuation; a comma can make a dramatic difference!

A "found poem" is a phrase, sentence, or group of sentences encountered somewhere in the real world: between the pages of a book or newspaper, painted on a sign, even printed on a cereal box. The student's task is to find a passage s/he considers interesting, beautiful, or strange, and to arrange the words as a poem. The arrangement may highlight or underplay certain words, may elucidate or obscure the original intent, and may create or emphasize multiple meanings.

Tsujimoto includes this poem "found" by an 8th grade student:

Found Poem
(words from "Food Report"
Honolulu Advertiser, Sept 1982, p. 1.)

Pasta ranges
In shape,
from the strand,
Of Spaghetti,
To the butter-
Fly-like
Farfalle

To the penne pasta,
And,
It ranges,
In size,
From the bird-
Shot-
Like acini
De pepe,
To the large,
Tube,
Called,
Mani-
Cotti.

(Student)

The student's arrangement of these words draws on multiple definitions of a single word. Ending the first line with "ranges" emphasizes a second meaning of the verb -- to wander or inhabit; the poem conjures up an image of pasta roaming the area between the Strand of Spaghetti and the butter.

2) Kennings (cf. Hayhoe and Parker, 1988 p. 79.)

A kenning is a word that re-names something, inviting a fresh look at it. Many names which are now standard began as kennings; for instance "daisy" was originally "day's eye," and "dandelion" comes from the French "dent de lion" (lion's tooth.) Whitecaps were the "white caps" crowning the heads of waves. Some student-invented kennings are: "footbags" for socks, and "sky beseecher" for a tree in winter (in Hayhoe and Parker, 1988).

The teacher begins a list of possible subjects for kennings (curtains, toothpaste, typewriter, dessert, pencil,

fog, mosquito...) and students brainstorm others. Students write their own kennings, then read them aloud and guess what object each kenning refers to.

"Midwest Town" contains the kenning "beehive homes."

3) Scrambled Poems (From Maley and Duff, 1989, "Jumbled Lines" p. 41; cf. Hayhoe and Parker, 1988, "Sequencing" p. 111.)

Just as a scrambled word is a word with the letters out of order, a scrambled poem is a poem with the lines out of order. The teacher writes all the lines of a poem on the board, but writes them <u>out of order</u>. The students work in pairs to try to unscramble the poem. Then the class as a whole tries to construct the poem line by line. (This could also be done by writing the poem on a mimeo, running it off, and cutting the lines apart. This way each group would be able to physically manipulate strips of paper containing the lines of the poem.)

The poem chosen dramatically influences the sort of skills involved in unscrambling. Very short poems can often only be arranged one way, but the task can help focus attention on correct syntax (e.g. "The Purple Cow" or "When You're Away"). Poems whose lines can be arranged in several ways can draw students' attention to rhyme (e.g. "Eletelephony," "Until I Saw the Sea") or most effective order of presentation.

N. B. Not all poems work well with this exercise. Be sure to try it out yourself if you are unsure.

4) Building Up from Memory (From Maley and Duff, 1989, p. 43)

This is an activity involving listening comprehension and memorization, but with a "hidden agenda" of improving students' awareness of their skills as language learners: What makes something easy or hard to remember? What kind of mis-remembering do they do?

The teacher reads a poem aloud and then asks students to tell the class any words or phrases they remember, including bits they are unsure of (e.g. "I think there was something about..."). The teacher writes each word or phrase on the board. The teacher reads the poem again and students work in pairs to try to reconstruct the poem. When they finish, they join forces with another pair to try to fill in the gaps. Then the whole class works together to record the poem verbatim.

Example:

Snowdrops

Yesterday I walked
Through the churchyard
and noticed
for the first time
the snowdrops
on the graves.
They must
have been there
for days
but I

was wind-blinded,
huddled into myself,
so anxious
to retain
my solitary
identity
that nothing
could touch me,
that I
could touch nothing.

-Patricia Pogson

5) Illustration (From Maley and Duff, 1989, p.47)

Illustrating a poem can be a way of interpreting it.

The teacher distributes several not-too-difficult poems and an array of pictures to groups of three. Each group selects a picture to illustrate one of the poems. The class meets as a whole and each group explains why the picture serves to illustrate the poem: (conveys the same feeling, shows what happened afterward, exemplifies the kind of thing the poet is complaining about...) This activity can serve as a lead-in to a discussion of differences in interpretation, for instance whether a fluffy, docile cat or a fierce-looking one would be a more appropriate illustration of "On a Night of Snow."

6) List poems: (cf. Hayhoe and Parker, 1988, p. 95)

Fairly rigid formal guidelines can often help students write cohesive poems while gaining practice with a specific grammatical structure. In addition, "rules" can help promote a game-like feeling about writing and minimize the

pressure to create "great" poetry. List poems work well as class collaborations with each student contributing a line. A list poem can be about anything: "Wishes," "Group History," "Memories," "I used to...but now," and "I Don't Like" are examples of list poem topics.

7) Wishes (From Koch, 1970; cf. Maley and Duff, 1989, p.115)

Wishes are a natural subject for list poems using "contrary to fact if-clauses." The class can make "rules" for the poems; for example each line must include a color, an animal, a place....

Example:

I wish I was a chocolate-covered flying horse.
I wish the boys were pigs except my brother.
I wish I was a bird so I can tell the birds Be quiet.
-Marie Flanagan
(Student) Koch, 1970

I wish I could find a chest full of money
Nice crisp green money
Lots of it
In 10's and 20's
I wish I could get revenge on L.B. for putting me on a committee to do a report on
Ancient India...
-Andrew Barish
(Student) Koch, 1970

8) Group History:

This is a good one to do near the beginning of a session to help students get to know each other a little. The whole usually far exceeds the sum of its parts.
Students talk in pairs about some of their memories of a certain time period and each student writes a line about his

or her partner. Using a fixed structure helps bind the lines together as a whole. One structure is:

Name in place,
Age
action,
action

Example:

Seshi, in Tokyo,
Ten years old
Practicing Mozart
Discovering Elvis

-Student
Graham, 1990

Memory of Mogadishu

I remember the taste of Helva
in Mogadishu

I remember the sound
of people praying
in a mosque
in Mogadishu

I remember the smell
of the grass
in my school
in Mogadishu

I remember the sound
of my grandfather
and grandmother
when I had breakfast with them
in Mogadishu

-Student
Graham 1990

9) I Used to... but now.... (cf. Koch, 1970; Levasseur, 1982)

This is another simple "list poem" formula which works

well....The contrast between "used to" and "now" also highlights the habitual meaning of the simple present in English.

Example:

I used to have hot coffee with you, but now my coffee is
getting cold.
These arms used to hold you, but now they are empty.
-Masayoshi
(Student) Levasseur, 1982

I used to like the Beatles
But now I like the Monkees
I used to have a white eraser
But now I have a black eraser
I used to have a dress of roses
But now I have a dress of apples
I used to have a teacher of meanness
But now I have a teacher of roses
-Maria Ippolito
(Student) Koch, 1970

10) Drip, Drop, Drizzle... (Maley and Duff, 1989, p.128)

This is an activity which encourages students to focus on the "item" of initial consonant cluster.

The teacher writes a bunch of consonant clusters on the board (e.g. dr, st, str, sc, gr, fl, tr, pr...) Each student chooses one cluster and writes down as many words as possible beginning with the cluster (e.g. drip, drop, drizzle, dreary, drapes, dreadful...). A dictionary is helpful. Students exchange papers and try to add more words. Students take back their original papers and group words which belong together (e.g. drip, drop, drizzle, dreary all relate to a rainy day). Students then arrange these words into a poem. Students form small groups to

share their poems and offer each other suggestions for additions or changes in sequence.

Listening to others' poems provides good practice in reading between the lines!

Example:

Building Site Accident

Crevasses,
Craters,
Cranes...
Creak,
Crack!
Cries,
Cringe,
Cringe,
Crash!
Crunch!
...Crippled
Crone--
Crazy
Crucifix.

In Maley and Duff

"We Real Cool," "The Runes on Weland's Sword," and "Sun" all make use of alliteration, though not to this extent.

11) I Don't Like... (From Maley and Duff, 1989, p. 114)

This is a very simple writing exercise which affords practice with gerunds or infinitives and provides a legitimate opportunity to complain!

Working in pairs, students compile a list of things they don't like (e.g. I don't like doing homework, I don't like cleaning the oven, I don't like having hiccups...). For contrast students may include things they do like as well.

In groups of four they compare lists and select a few dislikes from each person and arrange them as a poem. Each group reads its poem aloud either chorally or alternating solo lines. (See activity 15 for more information on reading aloud.).

Example:

I like to dance
but I don't like to walk
I like to sing
but I don't like to talk
I like to draw
but I don't like to write
I like the daytime
But I really prefer night

I don't like housework
Though I like it when it's done
I don't like having hiccups
Although burping's rather fun
I just don't relish doing
Most of the things I should
And I take a secret pleasure
In avoidance of "the good."

-T. M.

12) The Thinginess of Things (From Maley and Duff, 1989, p. 136)

This is a sort of personal brainstorming technique which can be adapted to other writing tasks as well.

The teacher asks students to name concrete things: (e.g. mirror, apple, fork, envelope...) Students work in small groups to write down as many true statements as possible about their "thing." After completing their lists, each group exchanges papers with another, and makes a poem out of

the other group's "raw material." Each group selects up to ten sentences, arranges them to form a poem, and makes slight modifications or additions if desired.

Groups read their poems aloud.

Example:

Money is...

The root of all evil...
the source of all good

A worry if you have it
A worry if you don't

something that doesn't grow on trees
Freedom

-Maley and Duff.

13) Unrolling a Poem (cf. Hayhoe and Parker, 1988, "Unrolling a Poem," p. 110; Maley and Duff, 1989, "Line by Line Unfolding," p. 49.)

This is an activity which encourages students to actively make predictions about a text.

The teacher places a poem on an overhead projector with everything covered up except the first line, and asks for comments: what is happening, what is the mood like... The teacher "unrolls" the poem phrase by phrase, each time asking students how the new information affects their hypotheses about the poem. After the entire poem is unrolled, students invent a title for it.

This activity works best with fairly short pieces. "Lord

Randal," and "Read" would be good choices. A variant of "unrolling" is to present the first line in its entirety and thereafter only the final word of each line, and have the students form a poem around this skeleton.

Another way to work with hypothesizing is to have students complete a poem. After reading the first stanza or two of "The Blind Men and the Elephant" or "The Owl and the Pussycat" they could work in pairs or triads to suggest how the story might end. Except in very advanced classes they should not be expected to follow the rhythm and rhyme scheme.

14) Nonsense Sense

Reading and writing poems using nonsense words can help students focus on what they do know, rather than on what they don't.

The teacher writes a short poem on the board which contains nonsense words, and students work in pairs or small groups writing down anything they can tell about the nonsense words and the text as a whole (e.g. it looks like a letter; this word must be a noun; I think this is an exclamation...). Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" is the classic example, but most students will probably be unfamiliar with its rather archaic style and language, and this might hinder their ability to guess effectively. Here's an example in a more accessible style:

The Cardaket

The cardeket went out to eat
One morning near intestiblake.
It saw a dozen frips or more
All sleeping on a barnacrake.
It quickly grabbed a few young frips,
The frips began to cobblerain;
The noise they made was loud and shrill
The cardeket ignored their pain,
and plinkly hit them with a frop
until they stopped their cobbleraining.
"The one thing that just makes me vope,
Is all this fuss and grap complaining!
said the fote and farnous cardeket.

The shiny frop was soaked with doil
From hitting the frips so cantably,
The cardeket was pencative
And wiped the frop most carefully,
And then he opened wide his stope
And put the camfry frips inside
He closed his stope and chewed and gulped
And so, that's how the poor frips died.
The cardeket gave a fulbig burp
and lay down to rest after his meal.
Then he began to cobblerain,
and prot his stomach and scream and squeal
"My stomach hurts, ayaiii! embay!
I'll never dine on frips again.
I'm sorry now for what I've done
From now on, I'll eat only men,"
Said the fote and farnous cardeket.

-T.M.

15) Limerick Completion (cf. Maley and Duff, 1989, p. 125.)

English is a stress-timed language rather than a syllable-timed language. This means that the length of time elapsed between stressed syllables is generally constant, regardless of how many unstressed syllables occur in between. Students who speak syllable-timed languages (e.g.

French) have difficulty with this facet of English.

Teacher writes several limerick on board and reads them aloud. Discusses stress and rhyme pattern (see "Special Forms," chapter 3). Writes several incomplete limericks on board, and students work in pairs to write the missing lines.

Example:

A furious man in a tree
said "What's all this nature to me?
I have looked at the view
Now what do I do?
I ought to have brought my TV."
-N. M. Bodecker

A furious man in a tree
said "What's all this nature to me?
I am chewed on by ants
I have torn my new pants,
And what's worse, it is past time for tea!"
-T.M.

16) Reading aloud and acting out (cf. Christison, pp. 57-8; Hayhoe and Parker, 47-50; and Fleischman, for poems written or adapted for a multiple-speaker format. Cf. Hayhoe and Parker 71-2 and Maley and Duff p. 84 for ideas for dramatization. Cf. Dewitt et. al for an extensive treatment of the value and implementation of choral speaking.)

Reading aloud is in itself a kind of acting in that it requires decisions of interpretation and expression. Recitation and performance allow students to fill in some of the white area between the lines of the poem with gestures and sound effects, and color the actual text of the poem by varying pitch, intonation, volume, pace, and the number of speakers. Deciding how to perform a piece requires students to examine the poem minutely and discuss their varying understandings of the poem. In addition it provides a real reason for working with paralinguistic and extralinguistic expression: students will tell each other "You don't sound very surprised," or "You'd look more threatening if you made a fist."

Examples:

All: American muse, whose strong and diverse heart so many men have tried to understand,
But only made it smaller with their art
Because you are as various as your land:

Boy 1 As mountainous-deep,

Girl 1 As flowered with blue rivers,

Girl 2 Thirsty with deserts,

Boy 2 Buried under snows,

Boys As native as the shape of Navajo quivers,

Girls And native, too, as the sea-voyaged rose.

All: Swift runner, never captured or subdued,
Seven-branched elk beside the mountain stream,
That half a hundred hunters have pursued
But never matched their bullets with the dream.

Leader: Where the great huntsmen failed, I set my sorry
And mortal snare for your immortal quarry.

-Stephen Vincent Benet
In DeWitt et. al.

Some other poems suitable for performance are "Cats," "How to Eat a Poem," "Money, " and all of those included in the "Poems for Multiple Voices" section.

17) Taking off from the Poem (cf. Koch, 1973.)

A poem can be used to introduce a topic or perspective for a writing assignment of either poetry or prose.

"This is Just to Say"--Using just 28 words, Williams' poem captures the essence of apologizing for something you are secretly glad you've done. After reading this poem, a student of Koch's wrote:

Sorry But It Was Beautiful

Sorry I took your money and burned it but it looked like the world falling apart when it crackled and burned.
So I think it was worth it after all you can't see the world fall apart every day.
-Andrew Vecchione

"The Tyger"--expresses Blake's awe of the tiger in a conversation. An student in Swaziland used the idea of

conversing with an animal in this poem:

The Snake

Snake, snake, hiding in the thick bush forest.
Sometimes surrounding the trunk of a tree like rope or string.
What kind of head do you have?
Because I see only a funny thing on your front end.
What kind of teeth do you have...you can't laugh and you can't sing.
What kind of movement do you have?
Because I see no feet, no claws, no legs.
When you are moving you seem to be attached to the ground.
Snake, snake, what kind of eyes do you have?
They look like dead things.

(In Koch, 1973)

"That's Gloria" expresses Gloria's offense at being stuffed into a secretary pigeon-hole. In "Mushrooms" Sylvia Plath treats a similar theme: the meek's resentment of being discounted. The poem could serve as an preamble to a discussion about stereotypes or a writing assignment dealing with peoples' misperceptions of others.

In "Flying Fish," Sandburg compares himself to the flying fish as being an in-between creature. This poem could be used as a point of departure for an assignment is which each student compares him- or her-self to someone or something.

Notes on the Activities

The preceding activities comprise a bare hint at some of the possibilities of poetry. I hope that the few I have included will provide an idea of the sorts of things poetry can be used for, and furnish an impetus for further exploration, either by reading other books on the subject, or by consulting your own imagination.

ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY

This section is simply an anthology of poems loosely clumped by some sort of similarity in form or content. All poems included are as the author wrote them. Although many use fairly standard syntactic structures and vocabulary, some include poetic inversions and words like "thee," "marguerite," "keel." For a beginning class you would obviously want to choose a simpler poem than for an advanced one, but you do not need to find poems in which the students already know every single word. For a given class I might well excerpt from a poem, or change a "thee" to a "you," or provide a glossary for some of the difficult vocabulary.

This anthology is meant to be browsed through. The chapter is followed by appendices to help you locate a poem using a particular grammatical structure or poetic device. To get you in the right frame of mind here are a few poems about--what else--poetry. Enjoy.

Prelude

How to Eat a Poem

Don't be polite.
Bite in.
Pick it up with your fingers and lick the juice
    that may run down your chin.
It is ready and ripe now, whenever you are.
You do not need a knife or fork or spoon
or plate or napkin or tablecloth.
for there is no core
or stem
or rind
or pit
or seed
or skin
to throw away.

-Eve Merriam
Reflections on a Gift...

Poem: a reminder

Capital letters prompting every line,
Lines printed down the center of each page,
Clear spaces between groups of these, combine
In a convention of respectable age
To mean: "Read carefully. Each word we chose
Has rhythm and sound and sense. This is not prose."

-Robert Graves
Zero Makes Me Hungry

Poems

In poems, our earth's wonders
Are windowed through
Words

A good poem must haunt the heart
And be heeded by the head of the
Hearer

With a wave of words, a poet can
Change his feelings into cool, magical, mysterious
Mirages

Without poetry our world would be
Locked within itself--no longer enchanted by the poet's
Spell.

-Peter Kelso
Miracles

Stuff and Nonsense

It is a truism that humor is the last thing a language learner comes to understand, but this may be partly because students are rarely exposed to it, and when they are, nobody bothers to explain what's funny. Although it may seem frivolous to teach nonsense verse, the humorous structures within these poems--puns, double entendres, irony-- occur in everyday conversation as well as in expository writing. Furthermore, nonsense is fun!

- Brief Foolishness and Word Play:

Wild Flowers

"Of what are you afraid, my child,"
inquired the kindly teacher.
"Oh Sir! the flowers, they are wild,"
replied the timid creature.

-Peter Newell
A Nonsense Anthology

If

If all the land were apple-pie,
And all the sea were ink;
And all the trees were bread and cheese,
What should we do for drink?

-Anonymous
A Nonsense Anthology

Lettuce

Lettuce! O lettuce!
Let us, O let us,
O lettuce leaves,
O let us leave this tree and eat
Lettuce, O let us, lettuce leaves!

-Edward Lear
The Nonsense Books of Edward Lear

The Purple Cow

I never saw a purple cow,
I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you anyhow,
I'd rather see than be one.

-Gelett Burgess
A Nonsense Anthology

Writing

Said a boy to his teacher one day:
"Wright has not written rite right I say."
And the teacher replied,
As the blunder she eyed--
"Right! Wright, write rite right, right away!"

She Sells Seashells

She sells seashells on the seashore.
The shells she sells are seashells, I'm sure.
So if she sells seashells on the seashore,
I'm sure she sells seashore shells.

-Anonymous
My Tang's Tungled

Eletelephony

Once there was an elephant
Who tried to use the telephant--
No! no! I mean an elephone
Who tried to use the telephon--
(Dear me! I am not certain quite
That even now I've got it right.)

Howe'er it was, he got his trunk
Entangled in the telephunk;
The more he tried to get it free,
The louder buzzed the telephee--
(I fear I'd better drop the song
Of elephop and telephong!)

-Laura E. Richards
My Tang's Tungled

*Set to music by Jane Hart in Hart, 1982 Singing Bee, New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard.

Pop Bottles Pop-bottles

Pop bottles pop-bottles
    In pop shops;
The pop-bottles Pop bottles
    Poor Pop drops.

When Pop drops pop-bottles,
    Pop-bottles plop!
Pop-bottle-tops topple!
    Pop mops slop!

Stop! Pop'll drop a bottle!
    Stop, Pop, stop!
When Pop bottles pop-bottles,
    Pop-bottles pop!

-Morris Bishop
Poem Stew

Mary Had a Little Lamb

1. Mary had a little lamb
Its fleece was white as snow
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go
It followed her to school one day
Which was against the rule
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb at school!

-traditional

2. Mary had a little lamb,

You've heard this tale before;
But did you know
She passed her plate
And had a little more?

-Anonymous
Poem Stew

3. When Mary had a little lamb,
The doctor was surprised.
When Old MacDonald had a farm,
The doctor nearly died!

-Anonymous

The Reason for the Pelican

The reason for the pelican
Is difficult to see:
His beak is clearly larger
Than there's any need to be.

It's not to bail a boat with--
He doesn't own a boat.
Yet everywhere he takes himself
He has that beak to tote.

It's not to keep his wife in--
His wife has got one too.
It's not a scoop for eating soup,
It's not an extra shoe.

It isn't quite for anything,
And yet you realize
It's really quite a splendid beak
in quite a splendid size

-John Ciardi
Book of Children's Literature

Jabberwocky

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!

The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird and shun
The frumious bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought.
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in Uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through, and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
Oh frabjous day, Callooh, callay!'
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did Gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogroves
And the mome raths outgrabe.

-Lewis Carroll
A Nonsense Anthology

- Epic Nonsense Poems:

Adventures of Isabel

Isabel met an enormous bear,
Isabel, Isabel, didn't care;
The bear was hungry, the bear was ravenous,
the bear's big mouth was cruel and cavernous.
The bear said, Isabel, glad to meet you,
How do, Isabel, now I'll eat you!
Isabel, Isabel didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She washed her hands and she straightened her hair up,
Then Isabel quietly ate the bear up.
Once in a night as black as pitch
Isabel met a wicked old witch.

The witch's face was cross and wrinkled,
The witch's gums with teeth were sprinkled.
Ho ho, Isabel! the old witch crowed,
I'll turn you into an ugly toad!
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry,
She showed no rage and she showed no rancor,
But she turned the witch into milk and drank her.

Isabel met a hideous giant
Isabel continued self-reliant.
The giant was hairy, the giant was horrid,
He had one big eye in the middle of his forehead.
Good morning Isabel, the giant said,
I'll grind your bones to make my bread.
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She nibbled the zwieback that she always fed off
And When it was gone, she cut the giant's head off.

Isabel met a troublesome doctor,
He punched and poked till he really shocked her
The doctor's talk was of coughs and chills
And the doctor's satchel bulged with pills.
The doctor said unto Isabel,
Swallow this, it will make you well.
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry,
She took those pills from the pill concocter,
And Isabel calmly cured the doctor.

-Ogden Nash
The Oxford Book...

The Mad Gardener's Song

He thought he saw an Elephant,
That practiced on a fife:
He looked again, and found it was
A letter from his wife.
"At length I realize," he said,
"The bitterness of life!"

He thought he saw a Buffalo
Upon the chimney piece:
He looked again and found it was
His sister's husband's niece,
"Unless you leave the house," he said
"I'll send for the police!"

He thought he saw a Rattlesnake
That questioned him in Greek:
He looked again, and found it was
The middle of Next Week,
"The one thing I regret," he said,
"Is that it cannot speak!"

He thought he saw a Banker's Clerk
Descending from the bus:
He looked again and found it was
A Hippopotamus.
"If this should stay to dine," he said,
"There won't be much for us!"

He thought he saw a Kangaroo
That worked a coffee-mill:
He looked again, and found it was
A Vegetable Pill.
"Were I to swallow this," he said,
"I should be very ill!"

He thought he saw a Coach-and-Four
That stood beside his bed:
He looked again, and found it was
A Bear without a head
"Poor thing," he said, "poor silly thing!
It's waiting to be fed!"

He thought it was an Albatross
That fluttered 'round the lamp:
He looked again and found it was
A Penny-Postage-Stamp.
"You'd best be getting home," he said,
"The nights are very damp!"

He thought he saw a Garden-Door
That opened with a key:
He looked again, and found it was
A Double Rule of Three:
"And all its mystery," he said
"Is clear as day to me!"

He thought he saw an Argument
That proved he was the Pope:
He looked again, and found it was
A bar of Mottled Soap.
"A fact so dread," he faintly said,
"Extinguishes all hope!"

-Lewis Carroll
Poems to Remember

The Wonderful Old Man

There was an old man
Who lived on a common
And, if fame speaks true,
He was born of a woman.
Perhaps you will laugh,
But for truth I've been told
He once was an infant
Though age made him old.

Whene'er he was hungry
He longed for some meat
And if he could get it
'Twas said that he'd eat.
When thirsty he'd drink
If you gave him a pot,
And what he drank mostly
Ran down his throat.

He seldom or never
Could see without light
And yet I've been told he
Could hear in the night.
He has oft been awake
In the daytime 'tis said,
And has fallen asleep
As he lay in his bed.

'Tis reported his tongue
Always stirred while he talked,
And his gait was so odd
Had you seen him you'd burst,
For one leg or the other
Would always be first.

His face was the drollest
That ever was seen,
For if 'twas not washed
It seldom was clean;
His teeth he exposed when
He happened to grin,
And his mouth stood across
'Twixt his nose and his chin.

When this whimsical chap
Had a river to pass,
if he couldn't get over
he stayed where he was.
'Tis said he ne'er ventured
To quit the dry ground
Yet so great was his luck,

He never was drowned

At last he fell sick,
As old chronicles tell,
And then, as folks say,
He was not very well.
But what was as strange
In so weak a condition
As he could not give fees
He could get no physician.

What wonder he died!
Yet 'tis said that his death
Was occasioned at last
By the loss of his breath.
But peace to his bones
Which in ashes now molder.
had he lived a day longer,
He'd have been a day older.

-Anonymous
A Nonsense Anthology

The Walrus and the Carpenter

The sun was shining on the sea,
Shining with all his might:
He did his very best to make
The billows smooth and bright--
And this was odd because it was
The middle of the night.

The moon was shining sulkily
Because she thought the sun
Had got no business being there
After the day was done--
"It's very rude of him," she said,
"To come and spoil the fun!'

The sea was wet as wet could be,
The sands were dry as dry.
You could not see a cloud because
No cloud was in the sky:
No birds were flying overhead--
There were no birds to fly.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Were walking close at hand;
They wept like anything to see
Such quantities of sand:

"If this were only cleared away,"
They said, "it would be grand!"

"If seven maids with seven mops
Swept it for half a year,
Do you suppose," the Walrus said,
"That they could get it clear?"
"I doubt it," said the Carpenter
And shed a bitter tear.

"O Oysters come and walk with us!"
The Walrus did beseech.
"A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk,
Along the briny beach:
We cannot do with more than four
To give a hand to each."

The eldest Oyster looked at him,
But not a word he said:
the eldest Oyster winked his eye,
And shook his heavy head--
Meaning to say he did not choose
to leave the oyster-bed.

But four young oysters hurried up,
All eager for the treat:
Their coats were brushed, their faces washed
Their shoes were clean and neat--
And this was odd, because, you know,
They hadn't any feet.

Four other oysters followed them,
And yet another four;
And thick and fast they came at last,
And more, and more, and more--
All hopping through the frothy waves,
And scrambling to the shore.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Walked on a mile or so,
And then they rested on a rock
Conveniently low:
And all the little Oysters stood
And waited in a row.

"The time has come," the Walrus said,
"To talk of many things:
Of shoes--and ships--and sealing wax--
Of cabbages--and kings--
And why the sea is boiling hot--
And whether pigs have wings."

"But wait a bit," the Oysters cried,
"Before we have our chat;
For some of us are out of breath,
And all of us are fat!"
"No hurry," said the Carpenter.
They thanked him much for that.

"A loaf of bread," the Walrus said,
"Is what we chiefly need:
Pepper and vinegar besides
Are very good indeed--
Now if you're ready, Oysters dear,
We can begin to feed."

"But not on us!" the Oysters cried
Turning a little blue.
"After such kindness that would be
A dismal thing to do!"
"The night is fine," the Walrus said,
"Do you admire the view?"

"It was so kind of you to come!
And you are very nice!"
The Carpenter said nothing but
"Cut us another slice:
I wish you were not quite so deaf--
I've had to ask you twice!"

"It seems a shame," the Walrus said,
"To play them such a trick,
After we've brought them out so far,
And made them trot so quick!"
The Carpenter said nothing but
"The butter's spread too thick!"

"I weep for you," the Walrus said;
"I deeply sympathize."
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

"O Oysters," said the Carpenter,
"You've had a pleasant run!
Shall we be trotting home again?"
But answer there came none--
And this was scarcely odd, because
They'd eaten every one.

-Lewis Carroll
A Nonsense Anthology

The Owl and the Pussycat

The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat;
They took some honey and plenty of money
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
"O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
    You are!
    You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

Pussy said to the Owl,"You elegant fowl!
How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long we have tarried:
But what shall we do for a ring?"
So they sailed away for a year and a day,
To the land where the bong-tree grows,
And there, in a wood, a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose,
    His nose
    His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?" Said the Piggy "I will."
So they took it away and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
    The moon,
    The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

-Edward Lear
The Nonsense Books of Edward Lear

Riddles and Surprise Endings

Riddles provide both a linguistic and a mental challenge and can encourage fairly sophisticated thought processes while using very elementary vocabulary and grammar. With a riddle a student has to take comprehension one step higher than with most elementary texts: instead of figuring out what the words mean, he or she must figure out what the poem means.

Riddle Song

I gave my love a cherry that has no stone,
I gave my love a chicken that has no bone,
I gave my love a ring that has no end
I gave my love a baby with no crying.

How can there be a cherry that has no stone?
How can there be a chicken that has no bone?
How can there be a ring that has no end?
How can there be a baby with no crying?

A cherry when it's blooming, it has no stone,
A chicken in the eggshell, it has no bone,
A ring when it's rolling, it has no end
A baby when it's sleeping, has no crying.

-Traditional
Knock at a Star

The Toaster

A silver-scaled dragon with jaws flaming red
Sits at my elbow and toasts my bread.
I hand him fat slices, and then, one by one,
He hands them back when he sees they are done.

-William Jay Smith
Reflections on a Gift...

When You're Away

When you're away, I'm restless, lonely
Wretched, bored, dejected; only
Here's the rub my darling dear
I feel the same when you are near.

-Samuel Hoffenstein
Poems to Remember

The Garden Hose

In the gray evening
I see a long green serpent
With its tail in the dahlias.

It lies in loops across the grass
And drinks softly at the faucet.

I can hear it swallow.

- Beatrice Janosco
Reflections on a Gift...

Egg

Who lives inside a house
that doesn't have a door?

It doesn't have a window
or light inside, what's more.

Who lives inside a house
With walls so frail and thin
That when he once comes out
He cannot go back in?

Some Opposites

What is the opposite of **riot**?
It's **lots of people keeping quiet.**

The opposite of **doughnut**? Wait
A minute while I meditate.
This isn't easy. Ah, I've found it!
A cookie with a hole around it.

What is the opposite of **two**?
A lonely me, a lonely you.

The opposite of a **cloud** could be
A white reflection in the sea,
Or **a huge blueness in the air,**
Caused by a cloud's not being there.

The opposite of **opposite**?
That's much too difficult. I quit.

-Richard Wilbur
The Oxford Book...

Money

Workers earn it,
Spendthrifts burn it,
Bankers lend it,
Women spend it,
Forgers fake it,
Taxes take it,
Dying leave it,
Heirs receive it,
Thrifty save it,
Misers crave it,
Robbers seize it,
Rich increase it,
Gamblers lose it...
I could use it.

-Richard Armour
Poems to Remember

A Second Opinion: Contrasting Viewpoints

Recognizing and understanding contrasting viewpoints in a text characterizes a "higher stage" of reading than following a single perspective. (See Chall, 1983 for a discussion of reading stages). Here are some short texts that involve multiple viewpoints. These poems could be used to good effect in a composition class in which students will need to write comparison essays. "On a Night of Snow" gracefully exemplifies how context impacts meaning--compare the mood of the words "Outdoors the wild winds blow" in the cat's and the mistress's stanzas.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The first approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant is very like a wall!"

The second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
He boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "The Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The fifth who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

-John Godfrey Saxe
Oxford Book...

On a Night of Snow

Cat, if you go outdoors you must walk in the snow.
You will come back with little white shoes that have heels of sleet.
Stay by the fire, my Cat. lie still, do not go.
See how the flames are leaping and hissing low.
i will bring you a saucer of milk like a marguerite,
So white and so smooth, so spherical and so sweet.
Stay with me, Cat. Outdoors the wild winds blow.

Outdoors the wild winds blow, Mistress, and dark is the night.
Strange voices cry in the trees, intoning strange lore,
And more than cats move, lit by our eyes' green light,
On silent feet where the meadow grasses hang hoar--
Mistress, there are portents abroad of magic and might,
And things that are yet to be done. Open the door!

-Elizabeth Coatsworth
Reflections on a Gift...

Who's in?

"The door is shut fast
And everyone's out:"
But people don't know what they're talking about!
Say the fly on the wall,
And the flame on the coals,
And the dog on his rug,
And the mice in their holes,
And the kitten curled up,
And the spiders that spin--
"What, everyone's out?
Why everyone's in!"

-Elizabeth Fleming
Magic Lights and Streets of Shining Jet

1) Black

Black the angry color,
The thunder color,
The mourning color,
The black dark underworld.
The creepy frightening color,
Bare, black trees
Silhouetted against the sky.
The silent night robber
Creeping, creeping,
In the silent black night,
Doing his black deeds.
A fine black stallion
Streaking past.
The black, black darkness.
The raven-black hair,
The raven-black dress.
Black anger of the war,
The cold black damp caves
And the underground caverns.

The angry black cold sea
Reaching,
With its black fingers,
Throwing the forlorn ships
To their black end
On the black rocks
In the black depths of the sea.
Black,
Black, the perilous color
And black the serious color.
Black,
The color of the dead.

-Jane Chester
Magic Lights and Streets of Shining Jet

2) For Mourning

I wear grey for mourning, never black.
Black is my hair, black is the intense
night of the dark of the moon straight up,
the rarest of wood and skin, the sleek of seals,
the shining of wide open pupils, the heart
of the poppy, the cat's patent leather flank.

I mourn in grey, grey as the sleeted
wind, the bled shades of twilight,
gunmetal, battleships, industrial paint,
the uniforms of trustees, the grey of proper
business suits and bankers' hearts,
the color of ash. Death comes in as fog.

-Marge Piercy
Available Light

Lovers, Friends, and Enemies

One of my main objectives in using poetry is to address language learners as whole people, replete with emotions as well as minds. Reading English texts which express feelings can free students to express their own feelings in speech or writing. It can be comforting to be able to empathize with the feelings expressed by these poems.

Valentine

Chipmunks jump, and
Greensnakes slither.
Rather burst than
Not be with her.

Bluebirds fight, but
Bears are stronger.
We've got fifty
Years or longer.

Hoptoads hop, but
Hogs are fatter,
Nothing else but
Us can matter.

- Donald Hall
Reflections on a Gift...

For Annie

With Annie gone
Whose eyes to compare
With the morning sun?

Not that I did compare,
But I do compare
Now that she's gone.

-Leonard Cohen
Poet's Choice

Poem

I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began--
I loved my friend.

-Langston Hughes
A Poison Tree

Brown Penny

I whispered, "I am too young."
And then, "I am old enough";
Wherefore I threw a penny
To find out if I might love.
"Go and love, go and love, young man,
If the lady be young and fair."
Ah penny, brown penny, brown penny,
I am looped in the loops of her hair.

O love is the crookedest thing,
There is nobody wise enough
To find out all that is in it,
For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away
And the shadows had eaten the moon,
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
One cannot begin it too soon.

-William Butler Yeats
Poems to Remember

Where Have You Gone

Where have you gone

with your confident
walk with
your crooked smile

why did you leave
me
when you took your

laughter
and departed
are you aware that
with you
went the sun
all light
and what few stars
there were?

where have you gone
with your confident
walk your
crooked smile the
rent money
in one pocket and
my heart
in another...

-Mari Evans
The Black Poets

When You are Old

When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

-William Butler Yeats
An Anthology of World Poetry

Permanently

One day the nouns were clustered in the street.
An adjective walked by, with her dark beauty.
The nouns were struck, moved, changed.
The next day a Verb drove up and completed the Sentence.

Each Sentence says one thing--for example, "Although it was
a dark rainy day when the adjective walked by, I
shall remember the pure and sweet expression on her
face until the day I perish from the green, effective
earth."
Or, "Will you please close the window, Andrew?"
Or, for example,"Thank you, the pink pot of flowers on the
window sill has changed color recently to a light
yellow, due to the heat from a boiler factory which
exists nearby."

In the springtime the Sentences and the Nouns lay silently
on the grass.
A lonely conjunction here and there would call, "And! But!"
But the Adjective did not emerge.

As the adjective is lost in the sentence,
So am I lost in your eyes, ears, nose, and throat--
You have enchanted me with a single kiss
Which can never be undone
Until the destruction of language.

-Kenneth Koch
The Norton Anthology of Poetry

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

-William Blake
A Poison Tree

Evening Star

Evening Star, enemy of lovers, why
Do you move so slowly across the sky
Now that another lover
Is warm under Maisie's bedcover?

-George Barker
Poet's Choice

To Look at Any Thing

Poetry is observation and interpretation--the personalization of an experience. Reading poetry is an empathic activity; writing it, an introspective or expressive one. Either can help foster a more attentive ear and eye.

To Look at Any Thing

To look at any thing,
if you would know that thing,
You must look at it long:
To look at this green and say
'I have seen spring in these
Woods' will not do--you must Be the thing you see:
You must be the dark snakes of
Stems and ferny plumes of leaves,
You must enter in
To the small silences between
The leaves,
You must take your time
And touch the very peace
They issue from.

-John Moffitt
Reflections on a Gift...

Through the Window

Through the window
I see the soft rain.

Through the soft rain
I see the neighbor's fence.

And just above the fence
I see fully opened umbrellas
Softly flowing from left to right
On and on.

Hidden by the neighbor's fence
I can not see
Who goes there
Under each of the umbrellas.

But, I see each umbrella
Softly flowing from left to right
On and on,
Shading the someone under it
In the soft morning rain.

-Naoshi Koriyama
Zero Makes Me Hungry

The Sea

The sea is a hungry dog,
Giant and grey.
He rolls on the beach all day.
With his clashing teeth and shaggy jaws
Hour upon hour he gnaws
The rumbling, tumbling stones,
And "Bones, bones bones bones!"
The giant sea-dog moans,
Licking his greasy paws.

And when the night wind roars
And the moon rocks in the stormy cloud,
He bounds to his feet and snuffs and sniffs,
Shaking his wet sides over the cliffs,
And howls and hollows long and loud.

But on quiet days in May or June,
When even the grasses on the dune
Play no more their reedy tune,
With his head between his paws
He lies on the sandy shores,
So quiet, so quiet, he scarcely snores.

-James Reeves
Magic Lights and Streets of Shining Jet.

Until I saw the Sea

Until I saw the sea
I did not know
that wind
could wrinkle water so.

I never knew
  that sun
  could splinter a whole
  sea of blue.

Nor did I know before,
  a sea breathes in and out
  upon a shore.

-Lillian Moore
Random House Book of Poetry

Thumb

The odd, friendless boy raised by four aunts.

-Philip Dacey
Knock at a Star

Cats

Cats, no less liquid than their shadows,
    Offer no angles to the wind.
They slip, diminished, neat, through loopholes
    Less than themselves; will not be pinned

To rules or routed for journeys; counter
    Attack with non-resistance; twist
Enticing through curving fingers
    And leave an angered, empty fist.

They wait, obsequious as darkness,
Quick to retire, quick to return;
Admit no aim or ethics, flatter
With reservations; will not learn

To answer to their names; are seldom
    Truly owned till shot and skinned.
Cats, no less liquid than their shadows,
    Offer no angles to the wind.

-A. S. J. Tessimond
Words Large as Apples

Midwest Town

Farther east it wouldn't be on the map--
Too small--but here it rates a dot and a name.
In Europe it would wear a castle cap
Or have a cathedral rising like a flame.

But here it stands where the section roadways meet,
Its houses dignified with trees and lawn:
The stores hold tete-a-tete across Main Street;
The red brick school, a church--the town is gone.

America is not all traffic lights
And beehive homes and shops and factories;
No, there are wide green days and starry nights,
And a great pulse beating strong in towns like these.

-Ruth De Long Peterson
America is Not All Traffic Lights

Red-Dress Girl

The rope swings in
and out, sister dances
over the rope
her red dress flying,
and the feet in the sneakers go
spank-dab, spank-dab.

I got dizzy watching
she's so smooth
more like she stood still
and the rope flew round
her.

Mother called, "Come in,"
She never minded,
her face calm
as an old moon
that red dress
flying.

-Ann Turner
Street Talk

Things Are Not What They Seem

Culture clash often results in mistaken judgments, and imperfect language skills contribute to being misunderstood. Students who feel that no one understands what they mean and who they are will appreciate these poems.

Mushrooms

Overnight, very
Whitely, discreetly
Very quietly

Our toes, our noses
Take hold on the loam,
Acquire the air.

Nobody sees us,
Stops us, betrays us;
The small grains make room.

Soft fists insist on
Heaving the needles,
The leafy bedding,

Even the paving.
Our hammers, our rams,
Earless and eyeless,

Perfectly voiceless
Widen the crannies,
Shoulder through holes. We

Diet on water,
On crumbs of shadow,
Bland-mannered, asking

Little or nothing.
So many of us!
So many of us!

We are shelves, we are
Tables, we are meek,
We are edible,

Nudgers and shovers
In spite of ourselves.
Our kind multiplies:

We shall by morning
Inherit the earth.
Our foot's in the door.

-Sylvia Plath
Poems to Remember

Subway Grove

Walk about the subway station
in a grove of steel pillars;
How their knobs, the rivet-heads--
unlike those of oaks--
are regularly placed;
how barren the ground is
except here and there on the platform
a flat black fungus
that was chewing gum

-Charles Reznikoff
Poems to Remember

Praying Mantis

That praying mantis over there
Is really not engaged in prayer.
That praying mantis that you see
is really preying (with an "e").
It preys upon the garter snake.
It preys upon the bumble bee.
It preys upon the cabbage worm,
The wasp, the fly, the moth, the flea.
(And sometimes, it its need is great,
it even preys upon its mate.

With prey and preying both so endless,
It tends to wind up rather friendless
And seldom is commended much
Except by gardeners and such.

-Mary Ann Hoberman
Random House Book of Poetry

That's Gloria

Mr. MacGregor says
(how come their names
always sound like a college?)
"Be a secretary, Gloria,
you're quick and those fingers
are a way out."

What's that supposed to mean?
If I sit still and just move
my little fingers I'll be all right?
If I don't talk but just
tappity-tap-tap, I'm O.K.?

How does he get to know so much?
He doesn't know what's inside--
A swirling purple dress,
feet so light, arms
and hands that never make mistakes,
and a voice that makes your skin
ripple up--

that's Gloria!

-Ann Turner
Street Talk

Reflections

This section is a hodge-podge of philosophy, exultation, wonder, and miscellaneous musings. The poems included are more about an emotion or sensation than about a thing or event.

April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops.
let the rain sing you a lullaby.

The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.
The rain makes running pools in the gutter.
The rain plays a little sleep-song on our roof at night--

And I love the rain.

-Langston Hughes
The Oxford Book...

Driving to Town Late to Mail a Letter

It is a cold and snowy night. The main street is deserted.
The only things moving are swirls of snow,
As I lift the mailbox door, I feel its cold iron.
There is a privacy I love in this snowy night.
Driving around, I will waste more time.

-Robert Bly
Poems to Remember

Song of the Sky Loom

O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky,
Your children are we, and with tired backs
We bring you the gifts that you love.
Then weave for us a garment of brightness;
May the warp be the white light of morning,
May the weft be the red light of evening,
May the fringes be the falling rain,

May the border be the standing rainbow.
Thus weave for us a garment of brightness
That we may walk fittingly where birds sing,
That we may walk fittingly where grass is green,
O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky!

-American Indian Chant
Poems to Remember

Flying Fish

I have lived in many half-worlds myself...and so I know you.

I leaned at a deck rail watching a monotonous sea, the same circling birds and the same plunge of furrows carved by the plowing keel.

I leaned so...and you fluttered struggling between two waves in the air now...and then under the water and out again...a fish...a bird...a fin thing...a wing thing.

Child of water, child of air, fin thing and wing thing... I have lived in so many half-worlds myself...and so I know you.

-Carl Sandburg
Poems to Remember

Fame

Fame is a bee.
It has a song--
It has a sting--
Ah, too, it has a wing.

-Emily Dickenson

The Runes on Weland's Sword

A smith makes me
To betray my Man
In my first fight.

To gather Gold
At the world's end
I am sent.

The gold I gather
Comes into England
Out of deep Water.

Like a shining Fish
Then it descends
Into deep Water.

It is not given
For goods or gear,
But for The Thing.

The gold 1 gather
A King covets
For an ill use.

The gold I gather
Is drawn up
Out of deep Water.

It is not given
For goods or gear
But for the Thing.

-Rudyard Kipling
The Norton Anthology

The Wind

Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling,
The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the leaves bow down their heads,
The wind is passing by.

-Christina Rossetti
Random House Book of Poetry

Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though:
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

-Robert Frost
Random House Book of Poetry

2) The Tyger (From Songs of Experience)

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when that heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

-William Blake
The Norton Anthology

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

-Langston Hughes
Reflections on a Gift...

This Is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

-William Carlos Williams
Reflections on a Gift...

I Never Saw a Moor

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.

I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given.

-Emily Dickenson
Immortal Poems of the English Language

We Real Cool
(The Pool Players
Seven at the Golden Shovel)

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike Straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

-Gwendolyn Brooks
Knock at a Star

Read

Do you remember
learning to read?
That book full of squiggles
like ants escaped,
the teacher's big thumb
on the page,
your heart beating inside
afraid that all you'd ever see
was ants--

Then a word popped out,
"See," and another, "Cat,"
and my finger on teacher's
we read, "I see cat."
I ran around the room
so happy I saw words
instead of ants.

-Ann Turner
Street Talk

Poems for Multiple Voices

Reading poems out loud chorally or in parts provides an opportunity to really pay attention to pronunciation and intonation and pacing, to the sound of the English language.

Paul Fleischman's poems were written to be read from top to bottom as duets, one person reading the left column, and the other the right, the two voices interweaving. When both voices have words at the same horizontal level, these lines should be read simultaneously. Many other poems can be adapted for performance, see activity 15.)

Honeybees

Being a bee

Is a pain.

I'm a worker
I'll gladly explain.

I'm up at dawn, guarding
the hive's narrow entrance

then I take out
the hive's morning trash

then I put in an hour
making wax,
without two minutes' time
to sit still and relax.

Being a bee
Is a joy.

I'm a queen

I'll gladly explain.
Upon rising I'm fed
by my royal attendants

I'm bathed

Then I'm groomed.

The rest of my day
is quite simply set forth:

Then I might collect nectar
from the field
three miles north

I lay eggs,

or perhaps I'm on
larva detail

by the hundred.

feeding the grubs
in their cells,
wishing that I were still
helpless and pale.

I'm loved and I'm lauded,
I'm outranked by none.

Then I pack combs with
pollen--not my idea of fun.

When I've done
enough laying

Then, weary, I strive

I retire

to patch up any cracks
in the hive.

for the rest of the day.

Then I build some new cells,
slaving away at
enlarging this Hell,
dreading the sight
of another sunrise,
wondering why we don't
all unionize.
Truly a bee's is the
worst
of all lives.

Truly a bee's is the
best
of all lives.

-Paul Fleischman, Joyful Noise

Dusk

swifts and swallows
Snapping up insects
swifts and swallows

Barns swallows
swifts and swallows
Cliff swallows
cave swallows
swifts and swallows

swallows
swift swallows
swift swallows

swift swallows
swift swallows
swift swallows

At dusk there are swallows
Swifts and swallows

swifts and swallows.
Barn swallows
Bank swallows
swifts and swallows

Cliff swallows
Swifts and swallows
Swift and all-swallowing
swallows

swift swallows
swift swallows
swift swallows
swift swallows
swift swallows.

-Paul Fleischman
I am Phoenix

Owls

Sky's dark
Larks sleeping
Black night

Bright noon
for owls.

(siskins sleeping)

Sun's down
Loons sleeping

Black night
for them,
Bright noon

Barn owls

Barred owls

(phoebes dreaming)
Screech owls
are

are
lis-
ten-
ing

Spotted owls

Saw-whet owls

Elf owls

are
call-
ing
out

Great gray owls
are
calling
out
into the night

Screech owls

lis-
ten-
ing

are
lis-
ten-
ing

(sleeping cranes)

(dreaming quail)
Elf owls
are
call-
ing
out

are
call-
ing
Great gray owls

calling

into the night.

-Paul Fleischman
I am Phoenix

Lord Randal

"O where have you been, Lord Randal, my son?
O where have you been, my handsome young man?"
"I have been to the wild wood; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary with hunting, and fain would lie down."

"Who gave you your dinner, Lord Randal my son?
Who gave you your dinner, my handsome young man?"
"I dined with my sweetheart; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary with hunting, and fain would lie down.'

"What had you for dinner, Lord Randal my son?
What had you for dinner, my handsome young man?"
"I had eels boiled in broth; mother, make my bed soon,
for I'm weary with hunting and fain would lie down."

"And where are your bloodhounds, Lord Randal, my son?
And where are your bloodhounds, my handsome young man?"
"O they swelled and they died; mother make my bed soon,
For I'm weary with hunting, and fain would lie down.

"O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son!
I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man!"
"O yes! I am poisoned; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain would lie down."

-Traditional Ballad
Immortal Poems of the English Language

N.B. "Fain would" = want to. I have modernized the language slightly where it did not interfere with the rhythm of the poem.

Special Forms

- Haiku:

Haiku is a traditional Japanese form which has three lines containing five, seven, and five syllables respectively. It focuses on some aspect of nature and implies a season and emotional state. Less rigidly defined, however, haiku can refer to any very short, spare poem. Writing haiku can encourage precision of thought and conciseness of expression.

The Wild Geese Leave

Wild geese! I know
that they did eat the barley;
yet, when they go . . .

-Yasui
Poems to Remember

Rooster

A bantam rooster
spreading his ruff of feathers
thinks he's a lion!

-Kikaku (trans. by Harry Behn)
Knock at a Star

Firefly

The first firefly. . .
But he got away
And I. . .
Air in my fingers.

-Issa
Poems to Remember

Frogpond

The ancient pond
A frog leaps in
The sound of the water
-Basho
Knock at a Star

Roof

After Weeks of watching the roof leak
I fixed it tonight
by moving a single board.
-Gary Snyder
Knock at a star

- Diamantes and Cinquains:

Both diamantes and cinquains are forms which require a set number of words of a specific part of speech. Reading diamantes or cinquains to identify the "rules" they follow can be a kind of grammar puzzle for students. Writing poems in these forms can serve as a review.

A cinquain is constructed:

noun
adjective adjective
verb verb verb
four-word phrase
noun

Peach
fragrant luscious
smell taste savor
memories of golden days
summer

-Hayhoe and/or Parker
Words Large as Apples

A diamante is constructed:

Noun 1
adjective(1) adjective(1)
-ing(1) -ing(1) -ing(1)
noun(1) noun(1) : noun(2) noun(2)
-ing(2) -ing(2) -ing(2)
adjective(2) adjective (2)
noun 2

Nouns 1 and 2 are contrasting nouns and each is described by two adjectives, three -ing words, and two related nouns.

Soil
dark, damp,
growing, blowing, changing,
hills, grass, seaweed, shells
fishing, swimming, splashing
shiny, wet
water

-Peter Hopple
Frogtown Features

Sun
gorgeous golden
glinting gleaming glowing
beach easy-chair : after-June afternoon
browning broiling bronzing
pal o' mine calamine
Sunburn

-S. J Parker
Words Large as Apples

- Limericks:

The limerick is a form indigenous to the English language. It is a humorous five-line poem with a set pattern of rhythm and rhyme. The first, second, and fifth lines rhyme and each contains three main stresses; the third and fourth lines rhyme and each contains two main stresses. Because of the essential role of stress in this form, either

writing or recitation can provide excellent practice for students unused to stress-timed languages. Clapping a steady beat may help illustrate the pacing:

There wás an old pérson of Déan
clap clap clap clap
Who díned on one péa and one béan
clap clap clap clap
For he sáid, "More than thát
clap clap
Would máke me too fát,"
clap clap
That cáutious old pérson of Déan.
clap clap clap

-Edward Lear
The Nonsense Books of Edward Lear

There was an old man from Peru
Who dreamed he was eating his shoe.
He woke in a fright
In the middle of the night
And found it was perfectly true.

-Anonymous
A Great Big Ugly Man...

A tutor who tutored the flute
Tried to tutor two tooters to toot
Said the two to the tutor
"Is it harder to toot or
To tutor two tooters to toot?"

-Anonymous

This middle-aged person of Keene
Is neither too fat nor too lean,
Not too good, not too bad,
Neither happy nor sad,
But content to be somewhere between.

-N. M. Bodecker
A Person From Britain

A rather vague person of Rame
just could not remember her name.
  When someone from Scones
  said: "My name is Jones,"
she said, "Oh? Perhaps mine is the same."

-N. M. Bodecker
A Person from Britain

There was a young maid who said, "Why
Can't I look in my ear with my eye
  If I give my mind to it,
  I'm sure I can do it
You never can tell till you try."

-Anonymous
A Nonsense Anthology

FOLK POETRY

Poetry is everywhere, but much of it is not acknowledged as such. There is poetry in the form of proverbs, children's games, songs, advertisements, tombstone inscriptions, and autograph verses. Many of these mesh well with lessons about American culture, customs, and history.

- Proverbs

What can't be cured
Must be endured.

Birds of a feather
Flock together.

Red sky at night,
Sailors delight;
Red sky at morning,
Sailors take warning.

Man proposes
God disposes.

There's many a slip
'Twixt cup and lip.

Out of the frying pan
Into the fire

Early to bed, and early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

If "if's" and "and's" were pots and pans
There'd be no need for tinkers.

A stitch in time saves nine.

- Folk Songs:

This Land is Your Land

This land is your land, this land is my land,
From California to the New York Island
From the redwood forests
To the gulf-stream waters
This land was made for you and me

As I was walking that ribbon of highway
I saw above me that endless skyway
I saw below me that golden valley
This land was made for you and me.

I roamed and rambled, and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of that diamond desert,
And all around me a voice was sounding:
This land was made for you and me.

Down in the city, in the shadow of the steeple
By the relief office I saw my people
As they stood there hungry, I stood there whistling:
this land was made for you and me.

As I went walking, I saw a sign there
On that sign it said "Private property"
But on the other side, it didn't say nothin'
That side was made for you and me.

The sun came shining, and I was strolling
And the wheat fields waving, and the dust clouds rolling,
As the fog was lifting, a voice was chanting:
This land was made for you and me.

-Woody Guthrie

N.B. I learned this song in elementary school, and they "neglected" to include the subversive stanzas about the relief office and the no trespassing sign. It would be interesting to try the "unrolling" activity with this song.

Show me the way to go home

Show me the way to go home,
I'm tired and I wanna go to bed.
I had a little drink 'bout an hour ago,
and it went right to my head.
Wherever you may roam,

On land or sea or foam,
You can always hear me singing this song:
Show me the way to go home.

Indicate the way to my habitual abode
I am fatigued and I wish to retire.
I had an alcoholic beverage sixty minutes ago
and it went right to my cerebellum
Wherever you may perambulate
On terra firma, brine, or effervescent froth
You can always hear me vocalizing this refrain--
Indicate the way to my habitual abode.

John Henry

When John Henry was a little baby,
Sittin' on his mama's knee,
He said "the Big Bend Tunnel on the C. and O. Road
Gonna be the death of me, Lawd, Lawd,
Be the death of me.

When John Henry was a little baby
Sittin' on his papa's knee
He played with a hammer and a little piece of steel,
Said "Hammer gonna be the death of me, Lawd, Lawd,
Gonna be the death of me."

Well John Henry had a little Woman,
Her name was Mary Magdalen
Every day she would sing to John Henry
Just to hear his hammer when it swing,
Just to hear his hammer when it swing.

Well the Captain said to John Henry
How he had bet a man
That John Henry would beat his steam drill down
Cause John Henry was the best in the land, Lawd, Lawd,
John Henry was the best in the land.

John Henry said to his Captain
"A man ain't nothing but a man,
But before I'll let that steam drill beat me down
I'll die with a hammer in my hand, lawd, Lawd
Die with a hammer in my hand."

John Henry kissed his hammer,
White man turned on steam,
Shaker held John Henry's trusty steel,
Was the biggest race the world had seen, Lawd, Lawd,
Biggest race the world had seen.

"John Henry said to his shaker,
"Shaker, why don't you sing,
Cause I'm pushin' forty pounds from my hip on down
Just listen to the cold steel ring, Lawd, Lawd,
Listen to the cold steel ring.

John Henry workin' on the mountain,
His hammer striking fire,
But he worked so hard it broke his poor heart
He laid down his hammer and he died, Lawd, Lawd,
Laid down his hammer and he died.

I Know an Old Lady

I know an old lady who swallowed a fly.
I don't know why she swallowed the fly--
I guess she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a spider
That wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly,
but I don't know why she swallowed the fly--
I guess she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a bird,
How absurd, to swallow a bird!
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
That wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly,
but I don't know why she swallowed the fly--
I guess she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a cat,
Fancy that, to swallow a cat!
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird,
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
That wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly,
but I don't know why she swallowed the fly--
I guess she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a horse...
She died, of course.

- Children's Chants and Games

Jump-rope Jingles

1) I've been to London,
I've been to Dover,
I've seen the whole world
Three times over
Over, over, three times over.
Drink all your whiskey down
and turn your glasses over.

2) Lincoln, Lincoln,
I've been thinkin'
What the heck
Have you been drinkin'?
Looks like water,
Tastes like wine,
Oh my gosh--
It's turpentine!

Hokey Pokey

Participants stand in circle all singing song and acting it out, take turns choosing body part to put in, put out, and shake.

You put your (right hand) in
You put your (right hand) out
You put your (right hand) in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey Pokey
And you turn yourself around
That's what its all about!

Children's Taunts and Threats:

Baby, baby,
Stick your head in gravy,
Wrap it up in
Bubblegum and
Send it to the navy.

I see London,
I see France
I see someone's
underpants!

_____ and _____
sitting in a tree
K-I-S-S-I-N-G
First comes love,
Then comes marriage
Then comes _____
In the baby carriage!

Finders: keepers
Losers: weepers.

See my fingers,
See my thumb,
See my fist--
You'd better run!

-Autograph Verses:

Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
Sugar is sweet
And so are you.

The roses have withered,
The violets are dead,
The sugar is lumpy,
and so is your head.

Roses are red,
violets are blue,
God made me,
What happened to you?

God made the forests,
God made the lakes,
God made you,
But we all make mistakes.

O U Q T
I N V U

In the golden chain of friendship, consider me a link.

```
  2 Nice
+
  2 Be
_____
  4 Gotten
```

When you get married,
And get out of shape,
Remember a girdle
Costs $2.98.

Success and happiness run in pairs,
If you can't find the elevator, use the stairs.

```
Never   B #
Never   B b
Always  B
```

Jail gives you coffee,
jail gives you tea,
Jail gives you everything
'Cept the darn old key.

```
May  your life be like arithmetic:
    Joys +
    Sorrows -
    Happiness X
    Love un- --.
```

Remember A
Remember B
But most of all,
Remember me.

- Miscellaneous Quotes

Bride's Necessaries (A bride is supposed to wea

Something old,
Something new,
Something borrowed, and
Something blue.

Epitaph

Here lies a poor woman who was always tired,
For she lived in a place where help wasn't hire
Her last words on earth were, Dear friends I ar
Where washing ain't done nor sweeping nor sewi
And everything there is exact to my wishes,
For there they don't eat and there's no washing
Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me neve
For I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever.

-Epitaph in Bushey Churchyard, c
Oxford Dictionary of Quotations

Wishing Verse (When a person says this verse a
wish upon seeing the evening's first star, the
to come true.

Star light, Star bright
First star I see tonight,
I wish I may, I wish I might
Have the wish I wish tonight.

POSTSCRIPT

Although there are a very few pages left
paper is not yet done. Neither you nor I hav
My task is to test these ideas more thoroughl
out at my upcoming job in Spain, to see what
and what should be scrapped. Your assignment
to try out these ideas, or your own applicati
some real, live students. And let me know wh
can be written to at:

Toni Maschler
c/o Henry and Chaninah Maschler
P. O. Box 531
Annapolis, MD 21404.

I hope to hear from you. Thank you and g

APPENDIX I

POEMS LISTED ALPHABETICALLY BY TI

Adventures of Isabel . . . . . .
American Muse . . . . . .
April Rain Song . . . . . .
Black . . . . . .
Blind Men and the Elephant, The . . . . . .
Bride's Necessaries . . . . . .
Brown Penny . . . . . .
Building Site Accident . . . . . .
Cardeket, The . . . . . .
Cats . . . . . .
Dreams . . . . . .
Driving to Town Late to Mail a Letter . . . .
Dusk . . . . . .
Egg . . . . . .
Epitaph . . . . . .
Eletelephony . . . . . .
Evening Star . . . . . .
Fame . . . . . .
Firefly . . . . . .
Flying Fish . . . . . .
For Annie . . . . . .
For Mourning . . . . . .
Found Poem . . . . . .
Frogpond . . . . . .
Furious Man in a Tree, A . . . . . .
Garden Hose, The . . . . . .
Honeybees . . . . . .
How to Eat a Poem . . . . . .
I Know an Old Lady

I Never Saw a Moor . . . . . .
I Wish I Could Find a Chest Full of Money .
I Wish I Was a Chocolate-covered Flying Hors
I Used to Have Hot Coffee with You . . . .
I Used to Like the Beatles . . . . . .
If . . . . . .
Jabberwocky . . . . . .
John Henry . . . . . .
Lettuce . . . . . .
Lord Randal . . . . . .
Mad Gardener's Song, The . . . . . .
Mary Had a Little Lamb . . . . . .
Memory of Mogadishu . . . . . .
Midwest Town . . . . . .
Money . . . . . .
Money is... . . . . .
Mushrooms . . . . . .
Now of my Three-score Years and Ten . . . .
On a Night of Snow . . . . . .
Owl and the Pussycat, The . . . . . .
Owls . . . . . .
Peach . . . . . .
Permanently . . . . . .
Poem . . . . . .
Poem: A Reminder . . . . . .
Poems . . . . . .
Poison Tree, A . . . . . .
Pop Bottles Pop-bottles . . . . . .
Praying Mantis . . . . . .
Purple Cow, The . . . . . .
Rather Vague Person of Rame, A . . . . . .
Read . . . . . .
Reason for the Pelican, The . . . . . .
Red-Dress Girl

Roof . . . . . .
Rooster . . . . . .
Runes on Weland's Sword, The . . . . . .
Sea, The . . . . . .
She Sells Seashells . . . . . .
Show Me the Way to Go Home . . . . . .
Snake, The . . . . . .
Snowdrops . . . . . .
Soil . . . . . .
Some Opposites . . . . . .
Sorry But It Was Beautiful . . . . . .
Song of the Sky Loom . . . . . .
Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening .
Subway Grove . . . . . .
Sun . . . . . .
That's Gloria . . . . . .
There was a Young maid who Said Why . . . .
There was an Old Man from Peru . . . . . .
There was an Old Person of Dean . . . . . .
This is Just to Say . . . . . .
This Land is Your Land . . . . . .
This Middle-aged Person of Keene . . . . . .
Through the Window . . . . . .
Thumb . . . . . .
To Look at Any Thing . . . . . .
Toaster, The . . . . . .
Tutor who Tutored the Flute, The . . . . . .
Tyger, The . . . . . .
Until I Saw the Sea . . . . . .
Valentine . . . . . .
Walrus and the Carpenter, The . . . . . .
We Real Cool . . . . . .
When You are Old . . . . . .
When You're Away . . . . . .

Who's in? . . . . . .
Wild Flowers . . . . . .
Wild Geese Leave, The . . . . . .
Wind, The . . . . . .
Wishing Verse . . . . . .
Wonderful Old Man, The . . . . . .
Writing . . . . . .

APPENDIX II

POEMS LISTED ACCORDING TO FEATURE PRONUNCIATION, GRAMMAR, SPELLING, AND SEMA

Pronunciation

Consonants	
P vs. B	Pop Bottles Pop-bottles
W, H	Poems . . . . .
Sh vs. S	She Sells Seashells . .
Pr	Praying Mantis . . . . .
L	Lettuce . . . . .
G	The Runes on Weland's Swo
Sc	Adventures of Isabel . .
Sw	Dusk . . . . .
Vowels	
Long "O"	Driving To Town Late . .
"R-colored" Vowels	Adventures of Isabel . .
	For Annie . . . . .

Grammar

Adjectives	
Predicate A's	Roses are Red . . . . .
	A Poison Tree . . . . .
Adverbs	
Degree complements	Brown Penny . . . . .
Logical Connectors	The Wonderful Old Man .

Preverbal A's of Frequency	The Wonderful Old Man .
	The Purple Cow . . . . .
Articles	
Def/Indef Alternation	I Know an Old Lady . . .
Clauses	
Adverb Clauses	Driving to Town Late . .
	John Henry . . . . .
Relative Clauses/Phrases	Eletelephony . . . . .
	I Know an Old Lady . . .
	The Mad Gardener's Song
	Riddle Song . . . . .
Conditional	
Counter-factual	If . . . . .
	I Wish I Could Find . .
Factual	On a Night of Snow . . .
Prepositions	Through the Window . . .
	The Blind Men and the Ele
	This Land is your Land .
Questions	The Wind . . . . .
	The Tyger . . . . .
	Egg . . . . .
	Lord Randal . . . . .
	Evening Star . . . . .
Verbs	

	A Poison Tree . . . . .
	The Reason for the Pelica
Modals	Stopping by the Woods .
	Poems . . . . .
	Wishing verse . . . . .
Present perfect	Jumprope Chants . . . .
	Lord Randal . . . . .
Pres. progressive	Owls . . . . .
Simple Past	Adventures of Isabel . .
	The Owl and the Pussycat
Simple Present	Cats . . . . .
	The Runes on Weland's Swo
	For Mourning . . . . .

Spelling

Homonyms	A Tutor who Tutored the F
	Pop Bottles Pop-bottles
	The Praying Mantis . . .
	Writing . . . . .

Semantic Structures

Inference	The Wind . . . . .
	Lord Randal . . . . .
	Building Site Accident . .
	The Cardeket . . . . .
Irony	The Wonderful Old Man . .
	The Walrus and the Carpent
	When You're Away . . . . .
Metaphor	Fame . . . . .
	How to Eat a poem . . . .
	Dreams . . . . .
	Subway Grove . . . . .
	Song of the Sky Loom . . .
Paradox	The Wild Geese Leave . . .
	Flying Fish . . . . .
Puns	Wild Flowers . . . . .
	Lettuce . . . . .
	The Praying Mantis . . . .
	Mary Had a Little Lamb . .

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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